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Businesses at Former Atomic Bomb Site Hurt by Work to Limit Radiation



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By **Meredith Hoffman** ([/new-york/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/meredith-hoffman](http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/meredith-hoffman)) on October 22, 2013 7:05am | Updated on October 22, 2013 7:05am
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RIDGEWOOD —
Businesses at a former atomic bomb project site on the Bushwick-Ridgewood border have taken major blows this year while work was done to protect the area from



Wolff-Alport

elevated levels of radiation (<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20121113/bushwick/epa-starts-radiation-abatement-at-former-atomic-bomb-project-site>).

Remediation work that started last winter at the former Wolff-Allport Chemical Company (http://www.epaosc.org/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=8030) — a former Manhattan Project site on Irving Avenue that's been contaminated since the '30s — has been a disaster for the two current businesses there, the owners said.

The Environmental Protection Agency found increased radon levels in the office of one of the businesses, Terra Nova construction, and installed a remediation system, officials said.

The agency is finishing construction of thick raised concrete and lead floors in both Terra Nova and its neighbor, Primo Auto Body Shop, to protect workers from the radiation.

"It's been a nightmare," said Silvio Hernandez, the owner of Terra Nova, which has a storage facility and office at the site. "We were out of business for three weeks."

The owner of Primo Auto Body said the construction had cost him significant business since only part of his space was functional.

"When the clients see the construction, they're not coming," the owner Alberto Rodriguez said in Spanish outside his building Monday. "It's not the same."

The EPA project manager, however, said the agency had worked closely with the two businesses and had even helped them organize their equipment.

"We're here to help, and we've tried to work with them the best we can," said the manager Eric Daly, noting that the companies could have been relocated altogether. "This is the best case scenario."

The shielding, which Daly said should be completed in December, has been to guard against gamma radiation, levels of which Daly said were not high enough to spur immediate health problems but were "high enough to do something" at the two businesses.

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"You don't want anyone to have any heightened potential for exposure," Daly said. Still, he said there is no way to determine the exact long-term effects of the radiation exposure to workers.

"To figure all that out you'd have to do a study of each person for years and look at a lot of factors," he said.

The EPA also tested a nearby daycare center and school but found no heightened radiation at those sites, Daly said.

Some work done by Wolff-Alport was performed under contract with the Atomic Energy Commission and the Manhattan Project, a research and development program that produced the first atomic bomb during World War II, according to EPA documents.

The company, which operated from the 1920s to 1954, imported monazite sand on a railroad spur behind the facility. Wolff-Alport processed the monazite to extract rare earth elements, leaving thorium and, to a lesser degree, uranium byproducts, according to the EPA.

"These waste byproducts were disposed of into a nearby sewer and other wastes may have been buried onsite," according to an EPA document released last year. (<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20121113/bushwick/epa-starts-radiation-abatement-at-former-atomic-bomb-project-site>)

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